

SECNAV Names Ship After American Abolitionist, Social Activist Harriet Tubman



CHURCH CREEK, MD, UNITED STATES

09.17.2023

[Office of the Secretary of the Navy](#)

Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced today that he named a U.S. Navy ship after American abolitionist and social activist Harriet Tubman, Sept. 17.

SECNAV Del Toro made the announcement during an Emancipation Celebration at Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center in Church Creek, Md. National Park Service Director Chuck Sams, who is also a U.S. Navy veteran, joined Secretary Del Toro for the announcement at the park.

The future USNS Harriet Tubman (T-AO 213) follows the tradition of naming John Lewis-class oilers after civil rights leaders and is the second vessel to bear her name. The first was a Liberty ship built in the United States during World War II.

“It’s an honor to maintain the naming tradition for our John Lewis-class oilers, and Harriet Tubman is more than deserving of this recognition,” said Del Toro. “She was born into unimaginable circumstances, but she dedicated her life to facing great danger and adversity, becoming a ‘conductor of freedom’, helping others escape slavery. In addition, during the Civil War, Tubman was the first African American woman to serve formally in the military. Her legacy deserves our nation’s continued recognition, and our fleet benefits from having her name emblazoned on the hull of one of our great ships.”

Born into slavery on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, in 1822, Tubman was named Araminta by her enslaved parents, Ben and Rit Ross. She changed her name to Harriet after marrying freeman John Tubman in 1844. Tubman escaped slavery in 1849, when her enslaver died and she was to be sold. Sept. 17, 1849, marks the day Harriet Tubman made the important decision to self-liberate. It was this date that she and her brothers Ben and Henry ran away; however, after a couple of weeks into their journey her brothers “disagreed with her about directions” and succumbed to the fear of being captured and convinced her to return with them. Tubman left a second time later that fall (exact date unknown) and reached freedom in Philadelphia.

In the ensuing years, she undertook numerous missions south to help at least 70 men, women, and children escape slavery. Known as “Moses,” Tubman became an iconic figure during the American Civil War, serving as a Union spy, scout, nurse and cook. In June 1863, she helped plan and execute a successful raid on Combahee Ferry near Port Royal, South Carolina,

guiding Union naval steamships carrying 300 Black troops of the 2nd Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment (Colored). The raid resulted in the liberation of more than 750 enslaved people. After the war, she continued to advocate for the rights of African Americans and women, speaking at a number of women's suffrage events alongside Susan B. Anthony. Tubman died in 1913 and was buried at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York.

"This tribute commemorates the powerful legacy of one of our country's most selfless heroes," said National Park Service Director Chuck Sams. "The Underground Railroad's most famous conductor was devoted to the cause of ensuring freedom for all despite personal sacrifice and risk. A true role model for the sailors who will serve on the USNS Harriet Tubman, her passion, courage and intelligence empowered her to overcome extreme obstacles for the benefit of others."

Along with the ship's name, Del Toro also announced that the ship's sponsor will be Tina Wyatt, the great, great, great grandniece of Harriet Tubman. The ship's sponsor represents a lifelong relationship with the ship and crew. Wyatt has spent her life helping others as a nurse and also educating and sharing the legacy of Harriet Tubman.

"Harriet Ross Tubman is a symbol of faith, freedom, family, democracy and love. Aunt Harriet's legacy is an inspiration to a higher calling within us all, and overall, how we are enabled by sharing love for others and self. It is her supply from God that she had been able to supply others throughout her lifetime and still, her footprint lives on and supplies us now. Such a strong and dazzling example of symbolism in her honor, the naming of an oiler, a ship that supplies other ships with fuel and cargo to function at its highest level, is an example of what she gave in life and continues to give," said Wyatt.

The future USNS Harriet Tubman is the ninth ship of the John Lewis-class. The class and lead ship are named in honor of the late civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis from Georgia.

The ships are designed to supply fuel to the Navy's operating carrier strike groups. The oilers have the ability to carry a load of 162,000 barrels of oil and maintain significant dry cargo capacity

Find more information about Fleet Replenishment Oilers online:

<https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2222909/fleet-replenishment-oilers-t-ao/>

Find more information about Harriet Tubman at the following:

- Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park

<https://www.nps.gov/hatu/index.htm>

- Harriet Tubman UGRR

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/pages/eastern/tubman.aspx>

- Harriet Tubman Byway

<https://harriettubmanbyway.org/>